

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, WOMEN'S PSYCHIATRIC
WARD
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Building Nos.
1202 & 1203)
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)
7601 Imperial Highway
Downey
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2800-AK
HABS CA-2800-AK

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, WOMEN'S PSYCHIATRIC WARD (Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building Nos. 1202/1203) Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-AK

Location:	<p>7601 Imperial Highway, located centrally in the block bounded by Golondrinas Street to the north, Dahlia Avenue to the east, Consuelo Street to the south, and Erickson Avenue to the west,.</p> <p>U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754241 N; 392763.3 E (LACO No. 1202) and 3754294 N; 392684.7 E (LACO No. 1203)</p>
Present Owner / Occupant:	County of Los Angeles
Present Use:	Vacant
Significance:	<p>The Women's Psychiatric Ward is significant under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history. Located on what is now known as the Rancho Los Amigos South Campus, the historic district portrays the establishment of the County Poor Farm at this location in 1887, its transition into a facility for long-term indigent medical care between the two world wars, and its emergence as a medical and rehabilitation center in the early post-World War II years. The building was erected in stages from 1919 to 1924 to house the mentally unstable female patients sent to the County Poor Farm by the Los Angeles County Hospital. The construction of the complex was during a large building initiative in the 1920s under the Poor Farm's most influential superintendent, William R. Harriman (1915-1931; 1933-1952). The psychiatric facility at the Poor Farm began in 1907 with the construction of the first Psychiatric Ward building. Women mental patients were housed in the first building along with the men until additional buildings were constructed that separated male patients from the female patients. The first Women's Psychiatric Ward was completed directly south of the men's psychiatric ward in 1919. A second women's psychiatric ward was completed in 1924, which mirrored the original ward and was connected by concrete wall "hyphens" on the north and south elevations, creating a complex with an interior courtyard. At the time of construction, the complex provided ward space and medical care for hundreds of Los Angeles County patients for many years. The Women's Psychiatric Ward Complex was converted to office and storage space in the late 20th century. The buildings are no longer occupied but continue to be used for storage.</p>

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1919 and 1924
2. **Architect:** P. O. Wright, Architect, County of Los Angeles Mechanical Department (LACO No. 1203). No known architect could be associated with LACO No. 1202.
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
4. **Original and subsequent occupants:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
5. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** County of Los Angeles Mechanical Department
6. **Original plans and construction:** An incomplete set of original architectural drawings for the Women's Psychiatric Ward are on file with the County of Los Angeles.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations were identified through observation and comparison with historic photographs and include the addition of metal horizontal siding to the west façade and north and south elevations of LACO No. 1203, replacement of the original split-wood shingled roof with composition shingles, and replacement of original wood doors with metal doors.

B. Historic Context:

Women's Psychiatric Ward

Begun in 1887/1888 as the new County Poor Farm, Rancho Los Amigos upon its inception was a rehabilitation facility that provided work, housing, and medical care to the indigent. The original purchase of 124.4 acres in the vicinity of the town of Downey, founded in 1873, was graded for roads; supplied with water from an artesian well; and improved with a Refectory Building (dining hall), the North and South Wards, an aviary, and an Office Building by 1889. During the following decade, barns and ancillary buildings with agricultural functions, a freight and passenger railroad depot, a combined bathhouse and laundry facility, and an additional ward were added.

By the 1890s, the County Poor Farm's livestock and agricultural operations were self-sufficient. The County Poor Farm had a herd of nearly 100 Jersey and Holstein cows, which provided a daily output of 200 gallons of milk. For eggs, the farm relied upon its productive, 800-chicken poultry farm located east of Erickson Avenue and north of Gardendale Street. East of the poultry yard was a hog farm, which supported approximately 150 Berkshire and Poland hogs. Sheep were raised and used for their wool. Percheron draft horses were kept to assist with heavy labor tasks. A wide range of crops were grown at the County Poor Farm, including fruits such as strawberries, peaches, and pears, and vegetables such as cabbage, corn, celery, onions, radishes, sugar beets, peas,

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cucumbers, and olives. With the assistance of farm supervisors, able-bodied patients helped work the fields and orchards, for which they received compensation of \$1.50 per day. Irrigation was provided primarily by the farm's artesian well. Water from the well was pumped using a 10-horsepower engine and stored in a water tower.¹

The County Poor Farm grew into a nationally recognized institution in the fields of cultivation and scientific breeding as a producer of prized crops and livestock. In addition to operating a successful agricultural enterprise, the County Poor Farm gradually expanded its role as a county medical facility. An increasing number of inmates with chronic medical disorders were being admitted to the County Poor Farm during the 1910s, prompting administrators to employ a staff of physicians and nurses to treat them. This surge in patients, and subsequently employees, provided the impetus for the expansion of services and facilities needed, resulting in the construction of a number of buildings at the property. The County Poor Farm's expansion reflected an important shift as the focus of the facility transitioned from rehabilitative care for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients.

In June 1915, William Ruddy Harriman was appointed the new superintendent at the County Poor Farm in order to reestablish the facility after devastating floods and a hog cholera epidemic in 1914 damaged the property's agricultural enterprises. Harriman promptly moved his family into the new Craftsman residence that had been constructed by the prior County Poor Farm superintendent, Charles C. Manning, at the center of the property. When Harriman took over management responsibilities at the County Poor Farm, the institution was providing care to 500 indigent men and women with a staff of 45. Under Harriman's leadership (1915–1931; 1933–1952), the County Poor Farm's agricultural fields and livestock rebounded, and an ambitious plan of improvements, including new and expanded wards, was immediately begun to address the rapidly expanding need for patient accommodations and services. Harriman dramatically improved the property, installing an irrigation system, upgrading the utilities, constructing new buildings, organizing administration duties and developing the property's park-like landscape. These improvements were largely accomplished in the wake of the financial surge following World War I.²

The range of improvements Harriman initiated at the County Poor Farm reflects the rapid growth of the facility during the 1920s. New and expanded services included the construction of new on-site housing that was provided for the employees responsible for around-the-clock patient care and attention, patient wards, additions to men's and women's psychopathic buildings, dining room extensions, nurses' dormitories, employee bungalows, a new power plant, and street improvements.

In addition to the physical changes that were implemented under Harriman's leadership, there were also philosophical changes at the County Poor Farm. Harriman subscribed to the idea that the physical condition of an individual could be improved through occupational therapy activities and

¹ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

² Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

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uplifting surroundings. Harriman's philosophy for self-improvement soon encompassed every activity at the County Poor Farm. He insisted that the patients' needs and comfort be addressed through the development of amenities at the County Poor Farm. Patients were assigned to work on the farm or in the greenhouse, based on their physical capabilities and individual talents. These occupational therapy activities were also intended as physical therapy, by providing the patients with fresh air, sunshine, and independence.³

Initially, the county only provided basic care for the patients of the psychiatric wards, and it was not until the early part of the 1920s that attempts were made to treat their conditions. One of the psychiatrist's suggestions was to install hydrotherapy units to calm distraught patients. As a result, hydrotherapeutic baths were installed for both the men's and women's wards in 1928. When it became apparent that a full-time doctor was needed, Dr. Douglas W. Ritchie was assigned to the psychiatric wards in 1928 and worked at the County Poor Farm for 20 years.⁴

The addition to the Women's Psychiatric Ward was completed in 1924, which mirrored the original ward and was connected by concrete wall hyphens on the north and south elevations, creating a complex with an interior courtyard for patients to have outdoor access, which was considered a vital component of their care. The Women's Psychiatric Ward was converted to office and storage space in the late 20th century.

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The Women's Psychiatric Ward consists of two single-story Brick Vernacular style buildings constructed in two stages. The courtyard complex is set between east and west grassy setbacks and is composed of a quadrangle plan consisting of two "H-shaped" ward buildings connected by one-story concrete block wall hyphens. The complex is symmetrical in appearance with horizontal massing. Projecting one-story wings are located on the north and south ends of the west-facing façade and east (rear) elevation. The complex retains most of its character-defining features that include: one-story height, horizontal massing and double H-shaped, courtyard plan; medium-pitched, complex roof consisting of hipped and gable-on-hip sections, punctuated by gabled roof vents; rafters with rounded tails exposed in overhanging eaves; concrete foundation regularly pierced by vents; brick (painted) exterior walls laid in common bond; sill above the foundation composed of three raised brick courses; regular fenestration pattern of evenly spaced window openings with segmental arched heads; segmental arch door openings; attached porches at the entries on the west (primary) and east facades;

³ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

⁴ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, p. 134.

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projecting (enclosed) porch spaces facing the interior courtyard; and interior brick chimney on the east (rear).

2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Women's Psychiatric Ward is fair as the building has been in continuous use for storage since the South Campus portion of Rancho Los Amigos ceased functioning as a medical facility.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The Women's Psychiatric Ward net interior condition space (interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed interior spaces) calculates to 19,567 square feet (LACO No. 1202) and 19,419 square feet (LACO No. 1203). LACO No. 1202 has a gross exterior area of 22,927 square feet and a footprint of 22,927 square feet. LACO No. 1203 has a gross area of exterior square footage of 22,193 square feet and a footprint of 22,193 square feet.⁵
2. **Foundations:** The building sits on a concrete slab foundation.
3. **Walls:** The exterior walls of both buildings that compose the Women's Psychiatric Ward are clad in painted brick in common bond pattern, with the exceptions of the west and north elevations of LACO No. 1203, which have replacement horizontal metal siding over the original brick walls. The Women's Psychiatric Ward generally reflects a vernacular aesthetic of sparse architectural ornamentation.
4. **Structural system, framing:** The structural system for the Women's Psychiatric Ward is brick.
5. **Porches:** Attached partial-width porches are centered on the west (primary) and east (rear) facades and are each defined by hipped roofs supported by four plain wooden posts. Additional porch spaces appear to have been enclosed by windows or screens and project into the interior courtyard.
6. **Openings:** The fenestration of the Women's Psychiatric Ward can generally be characterized as set within segmental arched window openings with lintels of double and triple bands of header bricks. Original windows (where extant) include: wood-framed, four-over-four-light, double-hung sash windows; one-over-one-light double-hung sash windows; one-light fixed windows; and four-over-four-light fixed windows. All windows are flat-headed and trimmed by slightly projecting header brick window sills.

Entrances are defined by segmental arched door openings with triple header bands and flat-headed door openings trimmed by wide door moldings. Original wood

⁵ Sapphos Environmental, Inc. 15 December 2008. Revised Memorandum for the Record No. 21: Update to the List of Buildings, Structures, and Features of the Rancho Los Amigos Historic District. Project No. 1217-056. Pasadena, CA.

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doors include (where extant) paneled and glazed doors with and without transom. Replacement metal doors are located throughout the building.

7. Roof:

- a. Roof shape, covering:** The Women's Psychiatric Ward is capped by medium-pitched hipped and gable-on-hip roof sheathed in composition shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves:** Moderately overhanging eaves are characterized by exposed rafter tails.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers:** Gabled dormers with louvered vents project from the roof, and triangular vents are located in the gable ends. Galvanized iron skylights with wire glass are located just below the ridgeline on the north and south elevation one-story bathroom projections.

C. Description of Interior: The Women's Psychiatric Ward consists of a central hallway flanked by a series of patient rooms on either side. Several larger rooms are located on the building's west end. Two multi-stall bathrooms are located on the north and south ends of the building.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting:** Existing landscaping surrounding the Women's Psychiatric Ward consists of mature grass, shrubs, and trees. Grassy courtyard setbacks are located at the building's east and west street frontage, and a grassy interior courtyard is formed by the quadrangle shape of the building. Concrete sidewalks and ramps surround the building. Rows of trees line the street frontages: jacarandas on the east, palms on the south, and magnolias on the west.
- 2. Orientation:** The Women's Psychiatric Ward is located centrally in the block bounded by Golondrinas Street to the north, Erickson Avenue to the west, Dahlia Avenue to the east, and Consuelo Street to the south. The complex was constructed with a courtyard to provide a pleasant, calming atmosphere for the patients; the landscaped "U-shaped east and west facades also contribute to the park-like visual setting of the South Campus.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

An incomplete set of original architectural drawings prepared by the County of Los Angeles Mechanical Department is on file with the County of Los Angeles. A set of as-found drawings was prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group for the County of Los Angeles.

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, WOMEN'S PSYCHIATRIC WARD
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Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
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C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Rancho Los Amigos Foundation collection

D. Supplemental Material:

Reduced copies of an incomplete set of original architectural drawings

Reduced copies of 2007 as-found architectural drawings

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for the Women's Psychiatric Ward was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to June 2011 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office (CEO). The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Campus Plan project. Measured surveys were carried out in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group, Los Angeles, California. Photographs were taken from January 2010 to June 2010 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Shannon Carmack, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Deborah Howell-Ardila, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, manager of cultural resources, Sapphos Environmental, Inc., reviewed the final report and supporting documents and provided research, writing, and project oversight.